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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

16 August 1985

Amal and Hizballah: The Line Between Politics and Terrorism

Summary

Amal and Hizballah are committed to improving the political status of Lebanese Shias, but see the fulfillment of their objectives in settings that are fundamentally incompatible. Amal is a secularist movement seeking redress of Shia grievances within the Lebanese political context. Hizballah rejects solutions based on compromise and advocates the establishment of an Islamic republic. [redacted]

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Amal and Hizballah are separate and distinct movements in terms of structure, policies, tactics, and ultimate goals. Amal, nonetheless, is riddled with Hizballah sympathizers seeking to undermine Amal's moderate policies. Despite their organizational separation, Amal and Hizballah are inextricably linked through informal networks based on family ties, ideological belief, and personal rivalries. [redacted]

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There is no evidence linking the Amal organization to acts of anti-US terrorism in Lebanon. The extensive and close contacts between Hizballah and individual Amal members, however, makes unofficial, clandestine cooperation a certainty. At the grassroots level there is little distinction between Amal and Hizballah and personal loyalties usually outweigh institutional affiliations. [redacted]

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Hizballah sympathizers have been identified at every level within Amal and include principal deputies of Amal chief Nabih Barri. Several senior Amal officials have close ties with Iran

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Levant Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis at the request of Ambassador Robert Oakley and Mr. Morton Abramowitz at the Department of State. Information as of 15 August 1985 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, at [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

and Islamic Amal, the terrorist organization we believe is responsible for the car bomb attacks against the US Embassy and Multinational Force contingent in Beirut during 1983 and 1984. Some Amal officials may have been involved in the kidnaping of US citizens in West Beirut: [REDACTED]

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Rivalry between Amal and Hizballah may impel both towards greater participation in terrorist acts--especially against Israel but also against the United States--in response to escalating demands for proof of commitment to the Shia cause.

[REDACTED]

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Amal and Hizballah have dramatically different visions of Lebanon's future. Both are committed to the improvement in the political status of the Shia community, but see the fulfillment of their efforts in settings that are fundamentally incompatible. [REDACTED]

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Amal has a secular political orientation. It is committed to the survival of a unified Lebanese state, and its adherents seek their political destiny within the context of the Lebanese political system. Amal seeks, ultimately, an end to sectarian politics in Lebanon and redress of longstanding Shia grievances through constitutional means. [REDACTED]

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Hizballah is committed to the establishment of an Islamic republic in Lebanon and sees the eradication of Western, particularly US, influence as the first step in that process. Hizballah has had some success in its attempts to outbid Amal in the competition for the hearts and minds of Lebanese Shia through its extensive social welfare programs funded largely by Iran. Its most powerful drawing card, however, has been the spectacular suicide operations against the United States and Israel and its surrogates. [REDACTED]

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Amal and Hizballah are separate and distinct movements in terms of structure, policies, tactics, and ultimate goals. Amal, nonetheless, is riddled with Hizballah sympathizers seeking to undermine Nabih Barri's leadership and the movement's moderate policies. The example of the Iranian revolution and the experience of Israeli occupation have transformed a growing number of Lebanon's once politically despondent Shias into zealots determined to establish Shia supremacy by any means. Hizballah's attraction stems primarily from its brazenness in carrying out daring operations that Shia rank and file perceive as single-handedly reversing US and Israeli policies in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

Hizballah sympathizers and covert adherents within Amal have been identified at every level of the organization from relatively minor military officials to principal deputies of Amal chief Nabih Barri. Despite the subversive relationship of many Amal officials with Hizballah, we believe that very few

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extend that commitment to the establishment of a theocratic state in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

Among senior and more politically astute Amal figures, Hizballah appears to be an effective mechanism for asserting Shia influence on the Lebanese domestic political process, and possibly, in seizing power. Hizballah also serves as a foil for those who accuse Barri of perverting Amal's goals and of selling out the aspirations of the movement's founder, the venerated Imam Musa Sadr. [REDACTED]

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The largely unsophisticated Shia masses probably cannot discern the antithetical nature of Amal and Hizballah aspirations. They are, however, impressed by the apparent success of Hizballah's tactics as opposed to the relatively ineffectual political program of Amal. Their affinity for Hizballah is reinforced by the preachings of Iranian-trained clerics who wield extraordinary authority over their followers. [REDACTED]

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Amal and Hizballah: Organizational Structures

Amal is a highly structured and hierarchical organization. The Presidency is the highest executive body and currently consists of six members and an exofficio representative of the Higher Shia Council. Nabih Barri is president. The other seats are held by Aqif Haydar, head of the political bureau, and Hasan Hashim, head of the Executive Committee. Rabab Sadr, the sister of Amal's founder, the missing Imam Musa Sadr, serves as her brother's representative, and the two remaining seats are held open for the Amal members who disappeared along with Musa Sadr during a trip to Libya in 1978. [REDACTED]

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Members of the Presidency are elected by the General Conference, Amal's supreme legislative forum which is supposed to meet every April to review Amal policies and leadership. Some 300-400 delegates attend, representing all of the regional commands of the organization and its executive bodies, as well as senior Shia religious leaders. Barri has refused to convene the General Conference for the past two years, reflecting his fears that his support within Amal has dwindled to the point that he could be ousted from office. [REDACTED]

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Directly under the presidency is a political bureau of some sixty members headed by Aqif Haydar. Although charged with directing Amal's political policy, the political bureau has only limited influence on Amal operations. Below the Political Bureau is the Executive committee headed by Hasan Hashim, which is composed of about twelve officers responsible for various tasks such as education, propaganda, and military activities. Within the Executive Committee, Zakariya Hamzah, a Hizballah loyalist, is in charge of military affairs. [REDACTED]

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Regionally Amal is divided into three commands: Beirut, the Bekaa Valley, and the southern command. The Beirut command is composed of eight zones, the Bekaa of about three, and the south is divided into nine zones. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the number of commands would appear

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to coincide with the strength of Amal in each region. Thus Amal draws its strength primarily from the South and is weakest in the Bekaa. [redacted]

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Separate from all of the above organizational apparatus is the security and intelligence apparatus headed by another Hizballah loyalist, Mustafa Dirani. Dirani's organization is independent of the military command of Hamzah. It consists of at least two major branches, one is concerned with internal security and a second is responsible of "special tasks." [redacted]

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Since Islamic fundamentalism first emerged as a recognizable movement in 1982, Hizballah has evolved rapidly into a highly structured organization in the Bekaa Valley, but remains amorphous in Beirut and South Lebanon. Headquartered in the Bekaa, it has been nurtured through the presence of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard contingent there and has been able to operate unfettered by central authority or opposition from Amal. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Hizballah organization in Beirut, [redacted] over the past two years it has made dramatic gains at Amal's expense. Hizballah has benefited from the existence in the southern suburbs of a highly politicized and alienated Shia population ripe for Hizballah's radical solutions. Amal, nonetheless, remains the stronger movement among Beirut's Shias, and much of Hizballah's operation there remains clandestine. [redacted]

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Hizballah's increasing confidence and capabilities are evidenced by the establishment of an office in Sidon which became active this spring following the Israeli withdrawal. The degree to which Hizballah is able to challenge Amal in its southern stronghold will be a test of Amal's staying power and the appeal of radical fundamentalism. [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

Despite fairly well-defined structures, command and control mechanisms are virtually non-existent in both organizations. Capabilities to implement or thwart actions is more a question of personal loyalties than hierarchical responsibility. The myriad of fellow travelers and ad hoc formations that identify with Amal and Hizballah further detracts from their formal organizational structures. At the grassroots level, both Amal and Hizballah devolve into amorphous movements. [REDACTED]

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These circumstances, plus the ready availability of weapons and know-how in the anarchy of contemporary Lebanon enables free-lance groups to operate at will. We believe that within the ranks of Hizballah any action that serves the cause is applauded, whether authorized or not, and further adds to the sense of solidarity among Shia activists who see these undertakings as an indication of the growing influence of their radical ideology. The lack of discipline within Amal enables Hizballah sympathizers to pursue nefarious activities with their radical colleagues with little fear of reprimand or punishment. [REDACTED]

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Loyalty and Leadership: Ties That Bind

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Hizballah followers are bound together by their fanatical devotion to Ayatollah Khomeini and the cause of sparking an Islamic revolution in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] some assumptions can be made based on the nature of the movement itself. We believe that Hizballah cadre share the camaraderie typical of conspiratorial underground movements. The cell structure of its rank and file elements may serve to channel hierarchical loyalties and inhibit personal rivalries. Moreover, entire extended families appear to be drawn into Hizballah, further strengthening interpersonal links among members. [REDACTED]

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The doctrine of clerical authority is central in shaping patterns of loyalty among Shias. The Shia believe that their clerics are endowed with divinely-inspired powers, an article of faith that obligates all believers to follow the rulings of the living ulema. Historically, political and social protest movements in the Middle East have been led by Shia clerics who have attempted to challenge the legitimacy of Sunni orthodoxy and its monopoly over the mechanisms of state authority. As a result, the prestige of the ulema has been enhanced because it has become an established tradition that ulema who are subservient to temporal authority are spiritually inferior. These factors have resulted in a religious hierarchy that can take independent positions and lead independent movements. [REDACTED]

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The Shia religious hierarchy in Lebanon is tied to that of Iran historically in both a religious and kinship sense. Lebanese clerics receive their training in Iran or in Shia holy cities in Iraq where they become the disciples of prominent Iranian theologians. Moreover, extensive intermarriage between Iranian and Lebanese clerical families has produced powerful theological dynasties that have served--and will continue to serve--as channels of

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[REDACTED]

solidarity between Iranian and Lebanese Shias, as well as purveyors of political influence. [REDACTED]

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Amal, on the other hand, is a broad-based overt organization that has been part of the Lebanese political process for more than a decade. As such, it reflects the same personal animosities and internal factionalism of other Lebanese parties. Dissatisfaction with moderate Amal leaders is being exacerbated as increased awareness of their Shia identity has led to growing impatience among younger Amal activists fed up with Amal's gradualist policies.

[REDACTED]

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The moderate center may not survive under the assault of fundamentalist rhetoric couched in the familiar terms of religion and the traditional Shia vision of the faithful triumphing over oppression. The increasingly militant rhetoric of Barri suggests that the moderate center itself is moving toward more uncompromising positions than in the past. [REDACTED]

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Within Amal personal rivalries are high. We believe that at the senior leadership level it is these rivalries--rather than strictly ideological considerations--that have spawned the close ties between senior Amal officials and the Hizballah movement. Nonetheless, power plays that depend for their success upon Hizballah or Iranian support will produce a leadership within Amal that is compromised by, and indebted to, these radical elements. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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The "Faithful" Within Amal

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The "faithful" cadre within Amal--those sympathetic to Hizballah and to the Islamic government in Iran--are attempting to purge Amal of its deviationist

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[redacted]

leaders and restore the movement to what they perceive as the principles laid down by Musa Sadr. The first objective is to remove Nabih Barri from office. This endeavor will be aided by Hizballah's close ties with key Amal officials.

[redacted]

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The challenge to Barri is crystallizing on two levels. Pro-Iranian radicals seeking to transform Lebanon into an Islamic republic view Barri as a major obstacle to their ambitions. He is also confronted by personally ambitious challengers who, while not committed to Islamic rule or Iranian hegemony in Lebanon, are prepared to cut deals with Iran and Lebanese fanatics in order to strengthen their own claims to leadership.

[redacted]

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Executive Committee head Hasan Hashim appears to be Barri's principal rival for leadership of Amal. The struggle between the two is personal rather than a serious disagreement over policy or ideology. Although both men were born in the south, Hashim seems to draw most of his support from the Bekaa, Hizballah's stronghold, giving the struggle serious regional and ideological implications.

[redacted]

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Barri has a number of lieutenants who are susceptible to Iranian and Hizballah blandishments. The most powerful Hizballah loyalists within Amal are Mustafa Dirani and Zakariyah Hamzah. Both maintain close and continuing ties with Hizballah and with the Iranian Ambassador in Damascus, who is responsible for implementing Iranian policy in Lebanon and for overseeing Hizballah activities there. Hamzah and Dirani are principal supporters of Barri's rival, Hashim.

[redacted]

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[redacted]

Aqil Hamiyah, Amal's military chief for Beirut, is another key radical figure within Amal. He maintains some degree of loyalty to Barri, but is also close to Hamzah.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

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Hamzah, Dirani, and Hamiyah all hail from the Bekaa--where Iranian and fundamentalist influence is strongest. All three have maintained the primitiveness associated with the Bekaa's tribalistic social order, however, and epitomize the cadre of thugs and gangland bosses within Amal whose rapaciousness outweighs their commitments to the Shia community, let alone to the establishment of Islamic rule in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

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Barri's relationship with Syria and his access to other players in the Lebanese milieu have proven invaluable in maintaining the sinecures of Amal officials like these. Nonetheless, under the right circumstances and for the right price, any of them could be encouraged to supplant their chief and lead Amal into an alignment with Hizballah. [REDACTED]

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Hizballah and Amal: Terrorist Links?

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[REDACTED] extensive and close contacts between Hizballah and individual Amal members make unofficial, clandestine cooperation a certainty. This has been confirmed concerning resistance operations against Israeli forces and their surrogates in South Lebanon, is highly probable in the kidnappings of at least some US citizens, and possible in the bombing of the US Marine Barracks in October 1983. We believe it is unlikely that Barri or other senior Amal officials--except those directly involved with Hizballah--would be witting to Hizballah plans in advance. [REDACTED]

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Although Amal does not espouse the virulent anti-American rhetoric that has become a hallmark of Hizballah, many Amal adherents are hostile to the United States. US support for Lebanon's Christian-dominated government, US support for the state of Israel, and US hostility to the Islamic regime in Iran, are powerful motivators for young Shia. Most probably would require little coaxing to participate, or at least cooperate, with Hizballah in anti-US actions. [REDACTED]

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The TWA hijacking last June was planned by the Hizballah [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Amal's subsequent involvement in the hostage crisis is not indicative of prior knowledge, cooperation, or approval of Hizballah actions. We believe that once Barri was involved in the negotiations, he attempted to use the situation to his advantage. Barri wanted to grab headlines from his detractors and demonstrate his ability to deal effectively with the United States and win concessions, in this case the release of the Atlit prisoners, for the Shia community. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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Hizballah elements responsible for the planning and execution of the TWA hijacking undoubtedly resent being upstaged by Barri and Amal. The carefully orchestrated press extravaganza surrounding Barri's mediation effort and Amal's public relations coup with the American hostages burnished Barri's and Amal's credentials within the Shia community and portrayed Amal to the world as the legitimate champion of Shia rights. Hizballah certainly is planning moves to discredit Barri and regain the momentum from Amal. [REDACTED]

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We believe that Imad Mughniyah is also the principal figure responsible for the kidnaping of seven US citizens in West Beirut. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He also has been implicated in the assassination of two French soldiers with the peacekeeping force in Beirut, and has been linked with other murders that have taken place in [REDACTED]

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the more parochial context of Lebanon's violent domestic conflict. By virtue of his position, we believe Mughniyah is in frequent contact with Amal officials, especially those who are opposed to Barri and, like Mughniyah himself, are close to Shaykh Fadlallah. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] In our view, however, it is highly improbable that Hizballah could spirit kidnap victims between Beirut and the Bekaa without the knowledge and probable participation of some Amal officials. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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Zakariyah Hamzah and Mustafa Dirani, by virtue of their key positions and close ties with Hizballah, are likely candidates for cooperation with Hizballah in this type of operation. We believe it would be difficult for the hostages to be maintained in Beirut for any length of time without the cognizance of at least one of these officials. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

It is impossible to sever the links between Amal and Hizballah. Despite the organizational separation of the movements and their competitive and frequently hostile relations, they are inextricably linked through a myriad of informal networks based on family ties, ideological belief, and personal rivalries. Barri is aware of the threat, but his attempts to counter radical influence within Amal have served instead to alienate further his opponents and enrage their followers. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Barri is fighting for his political life in an organization that is falling under the influence of Shia extremists who are implacable enemies of the United States. If Barri loses power and his moderate policies are repudiated by his

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successors, the United States will lose its only avenue into Lebanon's important Shia community. Unless Amal is able to deliver tangible political successes to the Shia community that would diminish Hizballah's attraction, Amal has few prospects of surviving as a moderate secular organization. [REDACTED]

Shia political demands cannot be fulfilled within the Lebanese context as long as a political modus vivendi eludes factional leaders. Despite Hizballah's inroads with Amal, we believe that Amal continues to represent the aspirations of the majority of Lebanese Shias. The longer Shia frustrations fester, however, the more irrelevant those distinctions will become. Rivalry between Amal and Hizballah may impel both toward greater participation in terrorist acts--especially against Israel but also against the United States--in response to escalating demands for proof of commitment to the Shia cause. [REDACTED]

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